



(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.)

RIDDLES OF LIFE

KISMET

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مُحَمَّدٌ وَنُصَلِّيَ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ الْكَرِيمِ

RIDDLE OF LIFE: KISMET.

We are often beset with what may be called the riddles of life. We are in a maze but have no notion how we are to get out of it. We want knowledge because the very consciousness of ignorance serves to increase our ignorance. We are sometimes comfortably off and enjoying life, when some sudden and unforeseen mishap upsets all our calculations and changes our prospects completely. These abnormal events, for such they seem to be, need a proper explanation as to their why and wherefore in order to put us on our guard and set us on the true path of happiness. Science is of very little assistance to us for the purpose. It seems to favour Fatalism which is about the worst thing possible. It renders us helpless, and at the same time weakens our sense of responsibility. Men of Science hold that since everything in the material world runs on pre-ordained lines, events being already pre-ordained, therefore it must be the same with human affairs. In short, if we need a light to guide us out of the complexities of life, it is here. We must have a clear view of the case. It is not only a matter of religion; it is a most important factor in all mundane affairs, and no system of theology prior to the coming of Islam has had a word to say on the subject. The Qur-án is the only book that enlightens us. It shows us a clear way and saves us from groping in the dark. Evil often comes to us as if it were an uninvited and most unwelcome guest. Knowledge from God should enable us to deal with it when it comes, for no man-

contrived system of philosophy has ever succeeded in evolving a satisfactory solution of the problem. Some refer to *Kismet*—an Arabic word used by Orientalists to convey the idea of predestination—though its literal meaning is ‘division’ or ‘distribution’. It is thought that good and evil are pre-arranged entities, and that they have already been allotted by the Lord amongst the people of the world. No effort, therefore, on their part can change their course, while they act as playthings in the hands of Fate. No prophet of God ever taught a tenet so dastardly as this—which could relieve men of all responsibility for their actions. We, however, find a similar doctrine in the Church creed, but it is none of Jesus’s teaching. Since the days of Saint Athanasius the doctrine of predestination has been laid down in all Christian creeds as an article of faith. It has taken a practical shape in every Christian home at the birth of babies still-born, or who die before they can be baptised. The poor souls are believed to be condemned by the Lord to eternal perdition, and must be buried in unconsecrated ground. This division of Mankind into “the saved” and “the unsaved” smacks strongly of predestination.

The *Qur-ān* gives us a sailing direction, as it were, by the aid of which we may steer a safe course through the troubled waters. First of all, we have been warned that we are under the governance of the Law. All laws are unchangeable and admit of no infringement. Their breach is sin, which entails unavoidable penalty. We must therefore respect the laws if we wish to keep ourselves immune from trouble. In this connection, the Book makes special mention of certain laws, which regulate our lives. These we must always keep before our eyes if we are to avoid disappointment and disaster.

The laws of Causation and Requitall work together under certain circumstances. But any confusion of ideas

with regard to them opens the door to an infinity of trouble. We must know that events occur under a course prescribed by God, and that everything has got its cause, as a result of which it inevitably appears. Similarly no action remains without its requital under Divine Decree. God has, therefore, been described as the cause of all things. We create circumstances, that develop under Divine Ordinance, to produce a result. We touch the cord and the instrument begins to sound automatically in accordance with His laws. By way of illustration, I may refer to the law at work in the vegetable kingdom. God made them to bring things to fruition wherever or by whomsoever they are grown. In this way God is the producer of the harvest, but its *first* cause is the person who planted the seed. If we sow wild oats they will produce an evil harvest under His laws, but we shall have to reap the crop which we have sown.

We often commit wrong under the impression that we shall evade detection or escape the consequences. We have, therefore, been clearly told in the Holy Qur-ân that we are under the eye of a Supervisor Who reads all that is hidden even in the innermost recesses of our hearts and knows everything that is concealed. ¹ As to the consequences, we are warned that these must inevitably ensue under the working of the laws concerned. The truth is perhaps best expressed by the principle that God brings forth good and evil consequences as they arise under His laws. And in this respect three things have been told us.

That all responsibility lies on our shoulders. Thus says the Qur-ân :

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty beyond the

¹ And if you are upon a journey and you do not find a scribe, then (there may be a security taken into possession, but if one of you trusts another, then he who is trusted should deliver his trust, and let him be careful (of his duty to), Allah, his Lord; and do not conceal testimony, and whoever conceals it, his heart is surely sinful; and Allah knows what you do. (2: 283).

extent of his ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought. ¹

Again—Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright, and whoever goes astray, to his detriment only does he go astray.

It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, and if you again return (to disobedience), We too will return to punishment. ²

Surely, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition. ³

That no one will bear our burden. The incidence of our action will fall on us. ⁴

That no one will intercede with the Lord on our behalf but under His previous and special permission. ⁵

The Law of Measure.—Divine Economy has created very few things, but has put them to many uses. These work

¹ Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought: Our Lord! do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake; our Lord! do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us; our Lord! do not impose upon us that which we have not the strength to bear; and pardon us and grant us protection and have mercy on us, Thou art our Patron, so help us against the unbelieving people. (2: 286).

² It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, and if you again return (to disobedience) We too will return (to punishment), and we have made hell a prison for the unbelievers. (17: 8).

³ For his sake there are angels following one another, before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's commandment; Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition; and when Allah intends evil to a people, there is no averting it and besides Him they have no protector. (13: 11).

⁴ Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray; nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another, nor do We chastise until We raise an apostle. (17: 15).

⁵ Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever-living, Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He pleases; His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth and the preservation of them both tires Him not, and He is the Most High, the Great. (2: 255).

under different measures and in different ways to serve different purposes. But if we change the measures and ways which have been fixed by the Divine Law harm must result. These measures, in themselves, are not conducive to any evil, but the harm is engendered when we do not apply them as they should be applied. These measures and ways have been called in the Qur-ân the "Bounds of God," and he who trespasses against them is punished as an evil-doer.¹ We, therefore, have been exhorted to acquire knowledge of these bounds. We are never punished unless we are given that knowledge beforehand.² The Book recommends the following three ways by which it may be acquired :—

(a) The first way is through observation. We have been given all possible means of information; we possess various senses and we have been advised to use them.³

(b) We must not behave like animals in the use of our eyes and ears, but we must make intelligent deductions and inferences from the knowledge we receive, otherwise through our ignorance we shall court disaster.⁴

(c) But there are things which call for minute observation which is not within everyman's capacity; and consequences, moreover, are very slow in coming especially in the case of moral delinquencies. This delayed action

¹ O you who believe! do not forbid (yourselves) the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and do not exceed the limits; surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits. (5 : 87).

² Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray; nor can the bearer of the burden bear the burden of another, nor do We chastise until We raise an apostle. (17 : 15).

³ So We proportion it—how well are We at proportioning (things). (77 : 23).

⁴ And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men; they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse error; these are the heedless ones. (7 : 179).

leads us to disregard moral laws. Sometimes we remain unaware of their very existence. Revelation from God, therefore, comes to enlighten us on these things. ¹

Vicissitudes of life occur for our instruction and often come in the guise of hardship, leaving an indelible impression on the tablet of our mind to be our guide for the future.

Whenever we go against the knowledge thus gained we are straightway punished; but since our actions are judged by the All-Knowing Lord, He knows the extent of the knowledge we have received, and judges us accordingly. He makes every concession on this score, for punishment never comes unless we have received guidance beforehand and have ignored it. But we cannot plead ignorance before him, as He knows all that is manifest or hidden. But He is not a judge Who is out to administer the extreme penalties of the law in every case. In judging between two parties, He acts as justice demands, but in dealing with our wrongs He is not so strict as an average judge. For this reason the Book styles Him as "the Owner of Requitals." He may award punishment to an offender or He may remit it, but he never makes an arbitrary use of His discretion. The three redeeming factors which invite His forgiveness are our forgetfulness, our mistakes and our inability to meet the requirements of the case. If some wrong is done under circumstances which are beyond the control of the doer he is not punished. Every case is decided on its own merits and God deals graciously with cases which deserve His consideration. ² Punishment is seldom external. Sometimes it takes such a form as venereal diseases, that punish from within the man who

¹ I am Allah the Seeing. (This is) a book which We have revealed to you (that you may bring forth men, by their Lord's permission, from utter darkness into light to the way of the Mighty, the Praised One. (14 : 1).

² Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's and whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it; then He will forgive whom He pleases and chastise whom He pleases, and Allah has power over all things. (2 : 284).

vitiates his blood through misconduct. The punishment of the Lord is of the same nature. He does not take delight in seeing us punished.¹ He has given us various gifts, but if we abuse them the very fact in itself becomes punishment. The Qur-ān calls it a thing acquired.² We read of Divine discretion in the matter of punishment and forgiveness, but it works only in cases where our actions deserve some punishment. It never comes undeservedly, but when a punishable wrong is committed, He may exercise His discretion of forgiveness. But if the remission of punishment would only confirm the offender in wrong-doing, the law will take its course. As long as He finds any redeeming feature in our conduct His mercy outweighs His anger; but when men are surrounded with sin and crime on all sides, punishment becomes inevitable and is meted out in proportion to the measure of the evil done. Good actions receive plentiful rewards, but misdeeds invite corresponding punishment.

Free will is the best gift granted to us by the Lord. No other creature in the world besides man has been endowed with freedom of action. Other creatures work as machines. But the Lord has given to Man, His vicegerent, the power of discretion. He wants us to be as sound in our judgment as He is Himself. Every latitude has been given us to perfect the exercise of the gift, and it is His wish that we should always take the right course but not under compulsion. We needed three things and we have them.

(a) *True Knowledge of Things*.—We have been given all necessary information, and have also been told how to

¹ *Why should Allah chastise you if you are grateful and believe? and Allah is the Multiplier of rewards, Knowing.* (4: 147).

² And leave those you have taken their religion for a play and an idle sport, and whom this world's life has deceived, and remind (them) thereby lest a soul should be given up to destruction for what it has earned: it shall not have besides Allah any guardian or an intercessor, and if it should seek to give every compensation, it shall not be accepted from it; these are they who shall be given up to destruction for what they earned; they shall have a drink of boiling water and a painful chastisement because they disbelieved. (6: 70).

acquire it so that it may guide us in the exercise of right judgment.

(b) Nothing should come in our way to interfere with our judgment. We are, therefore, allowed to pursue the course which we choose for ourselves. Equal facilities are given to the righteous and the wicked in this respect, and the Book speaks of it in the following words:—

All do We aid—these as well as those—out of the bounty of your Lord and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.¹

Everything has been left to our choice. Whatever course we elect to adopt we find no one to check it. All things come to us if we exert ourselves, whether we make a right use of them or not. Men enjoy all the amenities of life which makes them forgetful of the actual situation. They commit sin after sin as if unnoticed, until the Law of Recompense moves and they are brought to naught.

(c) *Chastisement*.—This is most essential as a disciplinary measure. We should be punished and should suffer the evil consequences of wrong judgment, otherwise we shall not realize the effects of wrong discretion. If it be God's will that we should cultivate soundness of judgment, He will chasten us.²

Guidance and Misguidance.—Misconception of tish principle has given rise to various false notions. Had it been left to the wishes of the Lord, He would have put all of us on the right path, but in that case we should have been mere automatons. To start with He sets us all on the right path,³ and then leaves us to our discretion. We abuse it often and

¹ All do We aid—these as well as those—out of the bounty of *your* Lord, and the bounty of *your* Lord is not confined. (17: 20).

² And certainly We sent (apostles) to nations before *you* then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves. (6: 42).

³ And they who reject our communications are deaf and dumb, in utter darkness; Whom Allah pleases He causes to err, and whom He pleases He puts on the right way. (6: 39).

come near destruction, and in this connection the Qur-án speaks of the Divine discretion that is used always to our benefit.¹ He may practise it to correct us or He may leave us to our own desires according to our past conduct.² If He sees that we respect words of guidance we receive, He helps us ; but if He finds that we do not seek it, He leaves us to misguidance. When a person passes it and there is no hope of his reclamation God decrees him to be misguided in which case no one can put him on the right path. This fact has been disclosed to us as a warning, but it is often taken as a piece of fatalism. This is what the Qur-án says plainly, but it has been misread by many.

In conclusion, I would refer to the laws of light and darkness working in Nature, which I think will explain the whole problem. The Sun is the source of all light, but if we close the windows of our room, it will become dark, and if we choose to remain in it for a considerable time our eyesight will suffer. The misfortune occurs to us under the working of the Divine Laws, but we ourselves are the real cause. In order to emphasize the case the Qur-án says that God works out mishaps. The Book first speaks of the various evil courses adopted by sinners and then says :—

Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled a fire but when it had illumined all around him *Allah* took away their light and left them in utter darkness—they do not see.³

¹ And thus do We try some of them by others so that they say : Are these they upon whom Allah has conferred benefit from among us ? Does not Allah best know the grateful ? (6 : 53).

² But whoever repents after his iniquity and reform (himself, then surely Allah will turn to him mercifully ; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (5 : 39).

³ Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled fire, but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness—they do not see. (2 : 17).

The Prophet in the words of the Qur-ān kindles the fire to expel the darkness from his neighbourhood, but there are people who would not care to listen to his words, and depart from him. They will reach the place where they will find no light. Words of advice fall on them as though on deaf ears. Thus they become dumb and deaf and blind for the purposes of guidance. It should not be forgotten that this stage of sinfulness comes only to man after a life of iniquity and unrighteousness. Whenever the Qur-ān speaks of this condition, it refers only to those who sin consistently over a long period and become case-hardened; and here I will mention a few cases in point—sins which are apt to take hold of our lives.

(1) Breach of covenant (5: 13); (2) Lying and hypocrisy (5: 41); (3) Injustice (5: 51); (4) Rejection of Divine Communications (6: 39); (5) Pride (7: 40); (6) Transgression (7: 102); (7) Want of observation, like animals (7: 179); (8) Forsaking of God (9: 67); (9) Exceeding Limits (10: 74); (10) Immoderation in religious law (5: 77); (11) Following low desires (6: 56); (12) Acting against the will of the Lord (4: 168); (13) Disregarding punishment if it comes (6: 43).

